

The Texas Tribune

The Texas Tribune has seen early success with audience growth and revenue while establishing itself as an innovator in digital content. Launched in 2009, The Tribune raised substantial funds to invest in journalism talent and in a comprehensive data platform.

The site was quick to attract a sizeable audience and has seen significant growth, with an average of 395,000 monthly visitors in the first four months of 2011.

Led by a team with deep business, editorial and IT expertise, The Texas Tribune strengthened its business development bench significantly in 2010.

Key Lessons: Innovation and Business Development

Innovation

The Tribune has established a fail-fast culture, which supports experimentation and enables it to quickly let go of what is not working.

The site defines its target audience as people who are highly engaged in Texas politics and civic affairs. Among content innovations, the organization provides access in a highly searchable format to hundreds of public databases, a significant draw to the site. It also created TweetWire, which aggregates tweets of all Texas politicians who are on Twitter.

In partnership with The Bay Citizen, The Tribune is developing Armstrong, an open-source publishing platform for nonprofit news start-ups (armstrongcms.org).

In October 2010, The Tribune launched a partnership with The New York Times to provide two pages of Texas-related content twice a week for Texas editions of The Times, creating a small revenue stream for the Tribune.

Business Development

The Tribune in 2010 made several moves that significantly expanded its business development activity:

- Hired a director of business development to target large-dollar sponsorship revenue, including event, content and sitewide sponsorships.
- Added an assistant director of development to focus on membership gifts of \$5,000 or less.
- Added a position of editor, freeing Evan Smith, who had been editor and CEO, to devote more time to CEO duties.
- Developed plans for an annual Texas Tribune Festival, with the first in early fall 2011, which will bring national and state experts to discuss political issues facing the state. The site expects to raise \$500,000 from sponsorships and ticket sales.

Key Facts

The Texas Tribune

Site: texastribune.org

Founded: 2009

Mission: To promote civic engagement and discourse on public policy, politics, government and other matters of statewide concern.

Content: Statewide coverage of politics, public policy and government, including political campaign polls, legislative news and information on locally elected officials.

2010 Revenue: \$1.82 million

2010 Staff: 26

2011 Unique Monthly Visitors: 395,800¹

Local Market Size: 24.9 million Texas residents²

Revenue

In 2010, the Tribune raised \$1.8 million and increased the diversity of its revenue sources. It relied on foundations for 18 percent of revenue and individual donations for 44 percent. At the same time, the Tribune raised nearly 17 percent of its revenue from corporate sponsorships, and nearly 10 percent from the Texas Weekly (specialty publications).

Donors and Members

The Texas Tribune had 2,255 members as of March 2011 and offers multiple membership levels. Memberships start at \$10 per year for students and range as high as \$5,000 annually with a three-year commitment. Depending on the membership level, benefits may include TribMonth, a monthly round up of the Tribune's best material compiled by CEO Evan Smith; an invitation to an annual cocktail party with Tribune reporters; invitations to exclusive social events at The Texas Tribune Festival; and the opportunity to promote a favorite nonprofit on the website.

Revenue Goals

The Tribune plans to diversify its revenue base through an annual giving campaign, major gifts, events, specialty publications and corporate sponsorships.

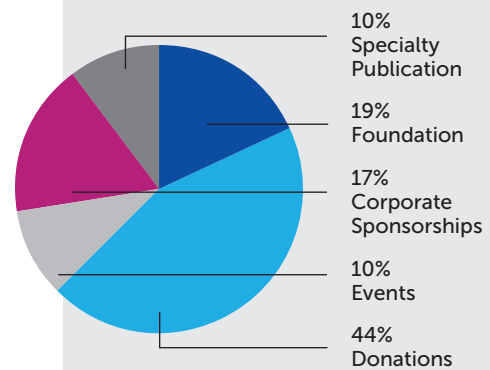
Expenses

The Tribune has developed a balanced team with technical, journalistic and business expertise, and that is reflected in the way it allocates its resources. The site significantly increased spending for marketing and development, from about 6 percent of expenses in 2009 to 19 percent in 2010. Total spending was \$2.88 million.

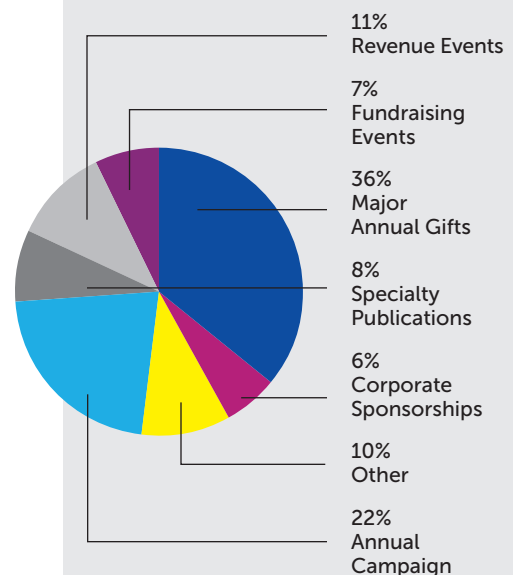
Website Analytics

The site was quick to establish a significant audience, reaching 200,000 unique monthly visitors within months of launch in 2009 and nearly doubling since then. In the first four months of 2011, unique monthly visitors averaged 395,800.³ Average time on site also was increasing and approached four minutes in early 2010, the highest among sites profiled.

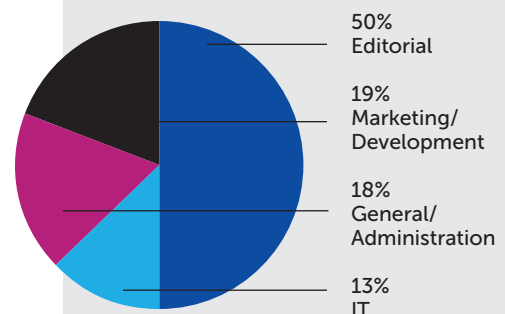
2010 Revenue - \$1.82 million



2014 Revenue Goals



2010 Expenses - \$2.88 million



¹ Average, January-April 2011

² 2009 Market Profile, ESRI

³ Compares data from November 2009-March 2010 with January-April 2011